

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 DRC-01 /097 W

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R 011834Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6943

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE PORT OF SPAIN 2356

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT TD

SUBJECT: GOTT PROGRAM ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

REF: POS 2343

1. PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS ANNOUNCED AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW SESSION OF PARLIAMENT SEPTEMBER 27 THAT THE CABINET HAD DECIDED TO INITIATE A DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND THAT ON THE BASIS OF THIS DEBATE THE GOVERNMENT WILL DRAFT AND SUBMIT TO PARLIAMENT A NEW CONSTITUTION. BEFORE ACTING ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION, PARLIAMENT WILL FORM A SELECT COMMITTEE FROM BOTH HOUSES TO STUDY THE PROPOSAL IN DETAIL AND TO INVITE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO TESTIFY BEFORE IT. AFTER THIS CONSIDERATION AND POSSIBLE AMENDMENT, THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE FOR FINAL APPROVAL. IT WILL REQUIRE A THREE-QUARTERS MAJORITY IN THE HOUSE AND A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN THE SENATE TO BE ADOPTED. ALTHOUGH THE PM DID NOT ANNOUNCE A TIME-TABLE FOR THIS PROGRAM, IT WAS REPORTED IN THE PRESS THAT THE INITIAL DEBATE WAS TO BEGIN WITHIN ONE MONTH.

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2. IN SELECTING THIS COURSE OF ACTION THE PM SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD REJECTED FOUR ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS: (1) SUBMISSION IN ITS PRESENT FORM OF THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTED BY THE CONSTITUTIONAL (WOODING) COMMISSION FOR AN UP OR DOWN VOTE BY PARLIAMENT; (2) HOLDING A "QUEEN'S HALL" PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM; (3) ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY REPRESENTING ALL PARTIES AND INTEREST GROUPS TO DRAW UP AND ENACT A NEW CONSTITUTION; AND (4) ENACTMENT OF MINIMAL AMENDMENTS TO THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION WHILE POSTPONING ANY FURTHER CHANGES UNTIL AFTER THE NEXT ELECTION. THESE COURSES OF ACTION, THE PM SAID, WOULD INVOLVE EITHER AN ABDICATION OF PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSIBILITY OR NEEDLESS DELAYS IN BRINGING ABOUT THE NECESSARY CHANGES.

3. THE PM'S MOVE BROUGHT IMMEDIATE PROTESTS FROM THE LEADERS OF OPPOSITION PARTIES AND MEMBERS OF THE WOODING COMMISSION. A.N.R. ROBINSON, LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION CONGRESS (DAC), CHARGED THAT WILLIAMS PLANNED TO MAKE HIMSELF PRESIDENT FOR LIFE. DAC'S DEPUTY LEADER ANGUS KHAN NOTED OMINOUSLY THAT, AS A RULE, COUPS OR ARMED TAKEOVERS OF THE STATE TOOK PLACE IN NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES WHEN DEMOCRACY BROKE DOWN. THE LEADING ADVOCATE OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, TAPIA GROUP'S LLOYD BEST, AND THE LEADER OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY, ALLOY LEQUAY, ALSO ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION.

4. COMMENT: BY REOPENING THE DEBATE ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM WITHOUT BASING IT ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION PRODUCED BY THE WOODING COMMISSION IN JANUARY 1974 AFTER TWO AND A HALF YEARS OF EXTENSIVE PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND DRAFTING, WILLIAMS HAS WIDENED HIS OPTIONS AND HIS INFLUENCE OVER THE NEW CONSTITUTION. HE HAS MOVED CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUE INTO A FORUM OVER WHICH HE EXERCISES MUCH MORE CONTROL THAN HE DID OVER THE COMMISSION, WHOSE MANDATE AND COMPOSITION WERE DECIDED AT A TIME WHEN WILLIAMS AND THE GOTT WERE WEAKENED AND SHAKEN BY THE 1970 REVOLT. THE PM AND THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PNM HAVE PUBLICLY OPPOSED SEVERAL OF THE COMMISSION'S MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING THOSE FOR A MIXED PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM FOR THE LEGISLATURE AND FOR ABOLISHMENT OF APPEALS TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL. IT SEEMS CLEAR, HOWEVER, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT WILLIAMS INTENDS BY HIS ANNOUNCEMENT TO INDICATE THAT HE IS FULLY IN CHARGE ON THIS POLITICALLY AND HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT ISSUE AND PLANS CAREFULLY TO CONTROL THE OUTCOME. IT ALSO SEEMS APPARENT THAT HE PLANS TO CONTINUE GOVERNING WITHOUT CALLING FOR AN ELECTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. MILLER

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